

Thompson—Southern Lau : an Ethnography

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erty without permission. The obligations of the mother's brother regarding the *vasu* are inherited by the mother's clan, so that as long as the *vasu* lives he may exercise *vasu* rights.

The *vasu* rights of a high chief extend to all his mother's people. For instance, the son of the sister of the high chief of Lau may, in the capacity of *vasu*, demand property from all the islands of the Lau group. He is called the great *vasu*, and his demands are a form of tribute.

The first *vasu* ceremony is conducted by the *vasu's* father when the *vasu* is a child. The father collects mats, tapa, sennit, and whales' teeth from his subclan. This property is called *i yau ni vaka lutulutu*. The father presents it according to the ceremonial presentation pattern (pp. 65-68) to the mother's brother, who accepts it and divides it among the members of his subclan. The ceremony gives the *vasu* the privilege of taking property at any time from the subclan of his mother's brother. He may take food from his uncle's garden and may kill and eat his pigs. Anything he requests according to the soliciting system (p. 207) will be granted. The maternal uncle, on the other hand, has the right to retaliate by taking property from the subclan of his *vasu*. This is called "causing the staff to fall" (*vakambale i titoko*). The privilege is, however, seldom exercised. (Hocart, 15, p. 40.)

The *vasu* relationship is technically a formalized exchange of property with deferred payment and not a one-sided appropriation. The exchange is not reciprocally balanced since eventually the *vasu* receives the larger share of property. It is a form of affinal exchange, one of the series of ceremonial exchanges of property between the paternal and the maternal clans which occur also at marriage, birth, and death. The *vasu* relationship in Lau serves to establish and emphasize a strong tie between a man and his mother's clan in a patrilineal society. Just as through patrilineal descent a man inherits membership with its privileges and obligations in the clan of his father, so through the *vasu* relationship he inherits a definite status accompanied by privileges and obligations in the clan of his mother.

Cross-cousin marriage is consistent with and may be genetically connected with the concept of the *vasu*. A man preferably takes a wife from the clan of his mother. As *vasu* he has the right to demand his mother's brother's daughter. The marriage involves a ceremonial exchange of property between the clan of his father and that of his mother and more closely knits the *vasu* with his mother's clan.

The avoidance observed between *vungu* reaches its highest expression between the *vasu* and his maternal uncle. The *abus* between *vungu* are emphasized in the *vasu* relationship, and an attitude of respect is shown on both sides.

The chief of Kambara says that the *vasu* relationship originated in the *vakalutututu* custom of the early inhabitants. He says that formerly among the

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"bush" timber which costs little more than the labor required²⁴⁵
for construction has also been introduced, but the natives⁴³⁹
prefer the more finished sawn timber type.

The government is also stimulating the copra industry^[654]
among the natives of Fiji by encouraging the planting of
coconut palms, by supplying seedlings for planting in areas
where seed nuts are not readily available, by carrying on
experiments in the breeding of early maturing types of
coconuts, and by assisting in an attempt to start the manu-
facture of dessicated coconut in Fiji.⁴¹

The upswing in the copra trade has naturally had an effect¹⁷⁸
on the southern Lau islands where the advance and retreat of²⁴⁵
western influence depends to, a large extent on the market⁴³⁹
demand and current price. On these isolated and land-poor
islands there are practically no natural resources of commercial
value except the coconut. The well-being of the natives and
their attainment of a new adjustment depend in a large mea-
sure upon the extent and the rate of recovery of the copra
trade. Too rapid expansion of the copra industry and with
it western influence had a detrimental effect on the culture.
Time and slow growth are necessary to absorb new elements
into the old life patterns and to establish a new adjustment
to the environment.

The most significant effect of the introduction of western¹⁷⁸
economy into southern Lau, however, has been a devitalizing¹⁸²
of the native economic life due to the clash of the fundamen-
tally opposed economic philosophies. If this is to be overcome
an adjustment between the two systems must be found which
will bridge the gap between them. Since, as a result of recent
changes, the whole tendency has been from the old com-
munalism toward growing individualism, the new adjustment
must lead the native slowly in this direction so that he will
eventually become strong enough to protect himself in the
modern economic world.

⁴¹ *Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture, Fiji, 1936, pp. 9-10.*

THE CANNIBALS ARE CONVERTED

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tions throughout the native culture. It led to the development 554
of other outlets for the acquisition of prestige, such as the 177
distribution of wealth and the emphasis on craftsmanship.
However, part of the tremendous energy formerly devoted to
this most vital group activity was suppressed and as a result
native life was devitalized.

The effect of Christianity upon the native spiritual world 797
has been profound. Lowering the old ancestor gods to the 776
status of devils, and raising the Christian Deity to omnipotence 182
has caused a deep conflict of loyalties in the minds of the
natives. Even today they feel guilty because they are neglect-
ing their old gods, and they say this neglect is responsible for
their present lack of vitality which they characterize as an
absence of "mana". Although a few courageous individuals
still propitiate their ancestors secretly in the bush, the old
religion has been effectively suppressed. Moreover, most of
the Fijian mythology, theology, and folklore has been lost.

In spite of the apparent success of the mission, its spiritual 797
message failed to a considerable extent to reach the natives 557
because they were totally unprepared by their outlook on life 781
to comprehend it. Gradually, as the Lauans have adapted
western ideas to their own, Christian ceremonial has mingled
with native rites. The gospel taught by the missionaries has
tended to become a formality marked by a feast every seventh
day and important mainly for its social value. The new
religion has become a channel for acquiring social prestige.
To be a good Christian today gives an individual standing in
the community and a native missionary wields considerable
power.

Malamala, the native missionary on Kambara, is a native 797
of a noble clan of Tanggu. On account of his office, however,
he does not live in Tanggu, but has moved into a large house
opposite the mission church in Tokalau. His sacerdotal office
and his rank in the upper class make him one of the leading
elders of the island, and he is careful to assume great dignity

197 in everything he undertakes. Usually when he goes to the other side of the island to conduct services he travels in state in his canoe, conspicuously decorated with white cowry shells, a symbol of chieftainship. He is dressed in the height of fashion—a fresh white shirt, a black *lavalava* and a blue woolen coat, even on the most sultry day. If he travels by land he walks slowly, swinging his cane, a symbol of rank. He is followed a few yards behind by his assistant, a youth who carries a small imported satchel. At the beginning of the service he takes from this satchel a Fijian Bible and a pair of spectacles set with plain glass. Attached to one rim is the price tag, which shows that the glasses were bought in the store. Before beginning to read he carefully dons the spectacles, but is no whit disturbed if, in the heat of the service, they slip down the bridge of his nose.

797 Especially did Christianity have a far-reaching effect on the native social organization. The breakdown of the ancestor cult undermined the inner structure of the native system of ranked clans. It took the sacredness out of chieftainship and broke the power of the tabu, which formerly maintained law and order in society. Moreover, the increased emphasis on personality rather than rank weakened the power of the chiefs. The mission tried to uphold chieftainship by encouraging the natives to pay tribute and abide by the commands of their chiefs, and the colonial officials followed mission policy. Their aim was to reinforce the power of the chiefs by appointing them as colonial officials and thus to utilize the native social system for political purposes as far as possible. However, in applying this plan, personality as well as rank had to be considered, and frequently chiefs were passed over in favor of gifted individuals of lower rank. Hence authority formerly held exclusively by the chiefs was divided between chiefs, native government officials, and native missionaries.

178 In recent times individuals deprived of hereditary power
575 and of warfare, their principal emotional outlets, have found

Kambara tend to lose.⁷⁰ Kambara also loses through the inclination of her men for the sea. Southern Lauans make excellent sailors on trade and government cutters in Fiji, and more young men ship as sailors from Kambara than from any of the other islands studied. In regard to the sex ratio, all the islands show a disproportionately large number of females to males except Mothe and Ongea, which show a fairly balanced ratio (see Table 2). Tongan influence has been strong on all the islands under consideration and hence fails to explain the variation. [161] [464] [162]

In seeking an explanation for the difference in rate of increase we find, however, that Fulanga and Namuka have several traits in common which are absent in the other three islands. The people of these two islands are outstanding in southern Lau for their zest for life, industriousness, and lack of self-pity. Both islands have poor anchorages and are disturbed less than the other islands by contact from the outside. Consequently the natives of these two islands are relatively conservative and maintain a stricter moral code. Finally, on these two islands, according to their genealogies, there are no clans belonging to the upper class. They are inhabited by clans belonging to the lower class. Hence they are easily administered and lack the intrigues and petty jealousies present among the nobles of the upper class. The Ongea clans also apparently belong to the lower class. However, at least two other important factors may have played a part in lowering the rate of increase on Ongea. There has been more inbreeding on Ongea, according to the genealogies, than on any of the other islands studied. Moreover, Ongea has the best anchorage in the group, and is visited not only by government cutters but also occasionally by yachts and naval craft. [161] [182]

Compared to Fulanga and Namuka, Kambara and Mothe

⁷⁰ These facts are based on a comparison of clan genealogies which were recorded for every island studied. For further details see "Marriage" in L. Thompson, *Southern Lau, Fiji, an Ethnography*, op. cit.

- 161 have been in closer contact with influences from the outside
● 182 world. Old tabus have broken down to a great extent on both islands and the morale is relatively low. The inhabitants are inclined to be self-pitying and to have lost a great deal of their energy. Moreover, these two islands are centers of the upper class and the conflict between the island chiefs and the colonial administration is reflected in unrest and political wrangling. These factors have probably played a rôle in retarding the rate of population growth.

It is clear from the above that any attempt to explain the increase of population of Fiji must take into account a complicated set of interacting factors, each of which contributes to the picture as a whole. From the analysis of population increase in southern Lau it seems fair to assume that, in this area at least, a factor of great importance in population growth is the presence of a spiritual force—a will to survive or zest for life—which grows out of a healthy and socially adjusted communal life. Here the greatest increase in population is found on islands least disturbed, not only by external influences but also by internal political jealousies.

000 neither ruthlessly to break down the one nor hastily to force the other. By emphasizing the individual rather than the clan, it would gradually free the individual from his kinship or clan unit and emphasize his part as an individual in the territorial unit—the village, the district, the colony, and the nation. By increasing his social responsibilities to larger groups it would expand his social horizon and gradually resolve the conflict between the old and the new social order. Hence such an educational system would help to solve the most vital problem in native administration, namely the preservation and stimulation of that zest for life, that will to power, necessary to psychical and physical health.

539 THE NEW ADJUSTMENT

*Me loma vinaka na kalou
A lutu manda na tokalau.*

Let the gods be of a gracious mind
And send a wind from the east.⁷⁷

- 178 I HAVE ATTEMPTED to describe the changes that have been taking place in the native culture of Kambara since the introduction of western civilization. We have seen that in spite of contact with western civilization a great deal of the old native culture is still very much alive. The fundamental cultural drives, although finding new outlets, persist as strongly as they did in the past. This is due mainly to several factors. As a result of the land policy of the colonial government, the link between the native culture and the natural environment, here as in other parts of Fiji, has not been broken, and the natives have been able to retain not only their old basic type of subsistence but also their economic independence and contact with old sacred places, animals, and plants. This is significant, for when a culture retains its physical setting it may achieve a new balance more easily in spite of its changing content. Moreover,
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⁷⁷ Thomas Williams and J. Calvert, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 144.

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Moreover,

because of the British policy of indirect rule, the native social system of ranked clans upheld by elaborate ceremonies centering in a divine high chief is the basis for the new political organization, and the natives have not lost their sense of social security in spite of the modern trend away from kinship toward geographic political units. Furthermore, the native population here as in all parts of Fiji is increasing, which is due in part at least to the government's systematic campaign for the control of disease in the colony and the promotion of sanitation and health.

The main administrative problems in Lau, as in many other parts of the Pacific, are the inevitable outgrowths of the attempt to blend two cultures—one relatively simple, the other complex—as fundamentally different as the Fijian and the western. As far as administration is concerned, the main conflicts between them are: kinship versus territorial bonds; rank versus status; and communalism versus individualism. As we have seen, these closely related conflicts may be resolved through the growing emphasis on personality. It is the rôle of the administrator in Lau to direct and control the process of change toward the development of personality in order to bridge the gulf between the two outlooks on life and, by blending the old and the new, to work slowly toward a new harmonious adjustment.

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Our data suggest further that, once firmly established and embodied in the symbol system, the attitudes and the habits of a human community, a balanced, functional, eco-cultural structure tends to endure if the human community is not wiped out or severed from its natural setting. The data also suggest that such an eco-cultural community structure is the living core of relationships which the human group, either consciously or unconsciously, tries in multiple ways to perpetuate. An understanding of this core may be expected to throw light on the problem of so-called "cultural resistance," or a people's acceptance or rejection of certain extraneous patterns of belief, thought and behavior. For example, in Lau the community has tended to reject foreign patterns of feeling, thought and behavior which interfere with, or break down, its basic eco-cultural structure, regardless of the regulations or the penalties involved. It would seem that to the extent the Lauans have been unsuccessful in their resistance to harmful interference with their group life processes, the intentional or forced introduction of nonfunctional patterns or the prohibition of functional ones has tended to throw off balance the community's whole eco-cultural structure and has operated directly against its well-being. The implications that these findings have for the problem of prediction in social science are manifold.

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Finally, the findings point up the practical significance of the eco-cultural approach and suggest that an understanding of a community's long-time, dynamic pattern of relationships is basic to the formulation of adequate norms or standards for the advancement of community welfare and for the development of community-oriented government administration.²² Accordingly, the significant problem regarding community welfare and the conservation of resources does not emerge simply as the question of how human health and institutions may be improved, or of how topsoil may be saved, or watersheds, and forest land protected, or organic species preserved from extinction, important though each of these aspects may be. The significant problem of community welfare emerges as a matter of using and adapting local beliefs, attitudes, habits and institutions, supplemented where necessary by appropriate new ones, to the end that human groups, through natural eco-cultural processes, may foster the development and maintenance of a balanced, healthy total community—plants and animals, as well as human groups.

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²² See Thompson, 1949.